



Festival boosts middle-schoolers' comfort and confidence with math

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More than 30 Laboratory volunteers helped 92 students from Carlos F. Vigil Middle School in Española take part in a morning of challenging and fun math activities at Northern New Mexico College (NMMC) on May 17.

Organized by nonprofit [STEM Santa Fe](#), in partnership with the Laboratory and NMMC, the third annual New Mexico Julia Robinson Math Festival also included tours of the NMMC campus.

[Julia Robinson Mathematics Festivals](#) take place all over the world in honor of the famous mathematician, and in Española the activities included math and logic puzzles such as Skyscrapers (a form of 3-D sudoku), and Set (a pattern matching game).

"I wanted to get the kids excited about math and problem-solving," says Lina Germann, founder and CEO of STEM Santa Fe. "This is the start of a long-term collaboration between STEM Santa Fe and Northern New Mexico College."

During the tour of NMMC, students tried out the interactive digital sandtable in the environmental science program.

The students' teachers Damon McGinn and James Scott were impressed with the focus they showed as they were engaged in the activities. "The only time I saw a phone out all morning was when someone wanted to take a photo of their finished project."

The tours of NMMC included stops in the college's solar energy research park, and the biology, chemistry and environmental science department, where assistant professor Joaquin Gallegos showed the students some of his work on wildland fire prediction using a digital sandtable.

"I think this is very important," says Lab postdoctoral student Kara Luitjohan, who was volunteering to help students with one of the activities. "I didn't have much exposure to STEM when I was in middle school, and now I'm working in the field I think this is a good way to give back. Plus, it makes me feel good!"

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